

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 0637

USIA FOR IEU, ICS/E

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OEXC, SOPN, UR

SUBJECT: PROTEST ON SAGIRASHVILI CASE

REF: (A) MOSCOW 0567, (B) MOSCOW 0568

1. EXHIBIT DIRECTOR QUINN, PROTOCOL OFFICER SMITH AND IO CALLAWAY MET JANUARY 12 AND JANUARY 13 IN TBLISI WITH SOVIET DIRECTOR GVISHIANI (OF USSR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE), DEPUTY DIRECTOR TSINTSADZE AND PROTOCOL OFFICER SORDIYA (OF GEORGIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE) TO DISCUSS SAGIRASHVILI CASE.

2. EMBOFF CONVEYED GREETINGS OF MESSRS. MATLOCK AND BENSON AND SAID IN GENERAL EXHIBIT IN TBLISI WAS APPARENTLY BEING WELL RECEIVED. REGRETABLE EXCEPTION WAS HARASSMENT OF SHOTA SAGIRASHVILI WHICH HAD LED TO HIS DEPARTURE FROM THE EXHIBIT. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF PROVOCATIONS DIRECTED AGAINST SAGIRASHVILI, EMBOFF SAID HIS DEPARTURE APPEARED BEST COURSE FOR HIS PERSONAL WELL-BEING AND SUCCESS OF EXHIBIT. HOWEVER, OUR OPINION WAS THAT SAGIRASHVILI HAD BEEN TARGET OF AND ORGANIZED AND TOTALLY UNJUSTIFIED CAMPAIGN. WE WERE MOT DISAPPOINTED THAT SOVIET CHAMBER OFFICIALS HAD NOT TAKEN AN ACTIVE ROLE IN HALTING PROVOCATIONS. SOVIET OFFICIALS
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WERE INFORMED THAT P&C COUNSELOR WOULD BE MAKING SIMILAR PRESENTATION TO CHAMBER OFFICIALS IN MOSCOW (IO NOT AWARE AT TIME OF MFA PRESENTATION.)

3. GVISHIANI REPLIED THAT DECISION TO REMOVE SAGIRASHVILI FROM EXHIBIT HAD BEEN TAKEN BY U.S. ALONE, THAT CHAMBER HAD TAKEN NO POSITION EXCEPT TO NOTE THAT PRESENCE OF SAGIRASHVILI

WAS DISRUPTING EXHIBIT. TSINTSADZE COMMENTED THAT CHAMBER HAD RECEIVED LETTERS ACCUSING SAGIRASHVILI OF MAKING DEROGATORY REMARKS ABOUT GEORGIA, WHICH WAS UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR. U.S. OFFICIALS SAID OUR IMPRESSION, BASED ON CHAMBER'S VERBAL DESCRIPTION OF LETTERS, WAS THAT THEY FOCUSED CRITICISM ON SAGIRASHVILI'S FATHER. WE REQUESTED CHAMBER OFFICIALS TO MAKE LETTERS AVAILABLE. EMBOFF STATED THAT FUNCTION OF CHAMBER OFFICIALS IS TO SERVE AS LIAISON AND ASSURE THAT EXHIBIT GOALS OF INCREASED CONTACTS AND BROADER UNDERSTANDING ARE REALIZED; APPARENTLY CHAMBER HAD NOT CONSULTED SUFFICIENTLY WITH U.S. EXHIBIT PERSONNEL NOR TAKEN A POSITIVE ROLE IN RESOLVING THE SAGIRASHVILI CASE.

4. AT SECOND MEETING, RUSSIAN TRANSLATIONS OF ALEGED LETTERS OF COMPLAINT WERE READ ALOUD BY MR SMITH. LETTERS INCLUDED REFERENCES TO SAGIRASHVILI AS "PROPAGANDIST" WHO WORLED FOR "ANTI-SOVIET RADIO STATION" AND WHO ADVOCATED "TENDENTIOUS" U.S. POLICIES. EMBOFF AGAIN SAID CHAMBER OFFICIALS SHOULD HAVE CONSULTED CLOSELY WITH U.S. STAFF AND TAKEN DEFINITIVE AND OFFICIAL POSITION ON SAGIRASHVILI CASE.

5. RESPONDING TO SEVERAL POINTS RAISED IN LETTERS, TO ILLUSATRATE U.S. PERCEPTION OF ROLE OF GUIDES IN GENERAL AND CONFRONT UNJUSTIFIED ATTACKS ON SAGIRASHVILI IN PARTICULAR, EMBOFF SAID ALL GUIDES WERE "PROPAGANDISTS" IN SENSE OF PRESENTING AMERICANS VIEW OF AMERICA AND OF EXPRESSING THEIR PERSONAL OPINIONS ON ANY APPROPRIATE SUBJECT. COMMENT THAT VOA WAS "ANTI-SOVIET" WAS TOTALLY REJECTED. EMBOFF SAID THAT IN POINT OF FACT, VOA AND EXHIBITS BOTH ARE AIMED AT BETTER CONFIDENTIAL

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UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN OUR COUNTRIES. WE ARE PERSUADED THAT VOA EMPLOYEE MR SAGIRASHVILI UNDERSTANDS THESE AIMS AND CONDUCTED HIMSELF ACCORDINGLY.

6. IN CLOSING DISCUSSION, EMBOFF AGAIN NOTED LACK OF COMMUNICATION AND RESPONSIBILITY DEMONSTRATED BY CHAMBER OFFICIALS. EMBOFF SAID WE HOPE NO FURTHER SUCH SITUATIONS DEVELOP AND TRUST CHAMBER OFFICIALS WILL LEND FULL ASSISTANCE TO ENSURE SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THE EXHIBIT IN TBILISI.

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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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